

3. A PROTECTIVE DEVICE AMONG WILD ELEPHANTS ?

With reference to the note, 'A Curious Protective Device Among Wild Elephants' by Sri K. V. Lakshminarayana in the *Journal*, 60 (1): 250-251, I narrate below an experience I had on 1 April 1964 in the Periyar Wild Life Sanctuary.

At 8 a.m. our boat approached a small herd of elephants which was on a wooded slope close to the water. It consisted of five adults and four young ones. The calves were nicely graded in size, the smallest being a hairy creature not much larger than a buffalo calf. A slightly larger calf also had plenty of hair on its body.

When first seen the animals were feeding in the grass and occasionally flinging earth over their backs. As they formed a nice group and were very close to us, I tried to take a photograph. Within the short time spent in borrowing a camera and examining its 'settings' the elephants deliberately arranged themselves in such a fashion that I could see nothing but the hindquarters of two adults. All the adult elephants had turned away from us and grouped themselves in such a way that the four calves were hedged in among them so thoroughly that we could see nothing at all of the calves!

When the boat started again and moved on, the elephants quietly broke up their 'formation' and began moving away from the water.

Though it was quite clear that the larger animals had bunched up in order to encircle the calves, no animal trumpeted or showed any signs of excitement or fear.

It should also be stated that we came across larger herds with a good sprinkling of very young calves, but these herds did not react perceptibly to the sound or the proximity of the boats.

The party consisted of guests invited to a seminar on American Literature conducted by the U.S.I.S., Trivandrum, and a few members of the U.S.I.S. staff. Sri Parameswaran Nair, of the U.S.I.S., will support the observations given above.

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[From a single instance of this kind it is not possible to say for certain that the 'formation' reported by Prof. K. K. Neelakantan was deliberate, particularly so in view of the fact that other herds of elephants took no notice of the boats. Nevertheless, having regard to the experience previously reported by Sri. K. V. Lakshminarayana, the present occurrence is of sufficient interest to be placed on record.—EDS.]